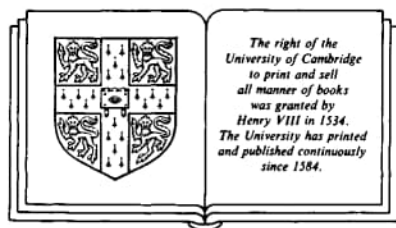


RUSSIAN AZERBAIJAN, 1905–1920

THE SHAPING
OF NATIONAL IDENTITY
IN A MUSLIM COMMUNITY

TADEUSZ SWIETOCHOWSKI



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE
LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE
MELBOURNE SYDNEY

"order and rule" principle, which he was determined to put into practice, although with different partners than had Gurbang and Babakhan. The vicars considered the Armenians a people attached to property, family, and religion and as such natural supporters of law and stability. Upon assuming office, he began at once his previous work of reviving the old tradition that had made friendship with the Armenians the pillar of Russian rule beyond the Caucasus. For Varonian-Dzhidze the issue was more than just an expedient in dealing with the revolutionary turmoil, and in his thinking he took a long-range view. Among the republican vicars officials he belonged to the partners of a war with Turkey in which he saw the Armenians again playing the part of Russia's advance guard. "Your Majesty is aware," he wrote to Nicholas II, "that throughout the history of our relations with Turkey in the Caucasian area, Russian policy has been based from the time of Peter the Great on benevolence toward the Armenians who have rewarded us with their active aid in the course of wars."¹⁷ His recommendations to the war reached beyond the territory of Transcaucasia, as he proposed "to take the initiative in the defense of the Turkish Armenians, especially at this time, so as not to discourage but rather to promote friendly feelings for us among the population of areas which might easily become the theater of our military operations."¹⁸ One of his first moves in office was to ask the war to transfer his 1805 decree on Georgian Church properties. The revocation of this decree in August 1905 paid off immediately in the form of spontaneous public demonstrations of gratitude, in which even Dzhidzhikhan joined. In the same time the vicars applied increasingly stringent measures against the Muslims. In the Tiflis district, for example, he went as far as to distribute arms to the Social Democratic militia to keep the "Tatars" in check.¹⁹ Instances of cooperation between local authorities and the Dzhidzhikhan were an open secret, and even the prime minister, P. A. Stolypin, reproached Varonian-Dzhidze for his leniency toward the Armenian revolutionaries.²⁰

In response to the superior organization of the Dzhidzhikhan, various Muslim groups that had been fighting in a hitherto haphazard fashion began to coordinate their actions. Yet it took the increasing reality of the Russian-Armenian conflict to move the Azerbaijanis to create a clandestine political association, specifically to counteract this danger. Known as the Difai (Defense),

the organization was founded in Ganja, in the fall of 1905, on the initiative of some local notables, who thereby earned their careers in politics.²⁷ Shah Ruzumshikin, the brothers Mirzayev and Khadi Khannumshikin, Ismail Dzyzhkhanov, Nadi Uzunbakh (Yuzvinski), and Dr. Hasan Aghasov. From Baku they were joined by Akhmed Aghasov. The establishment of the Difa signified the rise of Ganja as the center of the national movement in Azerbaijan, a position the town was to hold from then on.

Remarkably, the leaders of the Difa tried to show the edge of the intercommunal conflict. Aghasov usually learned the words to a Ganja songster that even "wild animals do not devour their own kind" and reminded them that the Muslims and the Armenians had for centuries lived in peace before the coming of the Russians.²⁸ Similar words were recorded favorably in a declaration on the "Turk-Armenian War" that Dzyzhkhanov delivered before the State Duma:

We, the Muslims, were sold by the administration: you have been systematically rendered by the Armenians. They are arming themselves and plan to invade their own: now they will do so, with you. The Armenians were told that the idea of Pan-Islamism had gone from their minds in all areas of the Muslim community, and now the Muslims would massacre them, such was the pattern of the provocation. When the killing started in Baku, the administration tried to find an excuse in the fact that it had not enough troops at hand, and that it could not have foreseen that the clashes would take place. Then, it was said that the clashes had occurred on the ground of national unity. I declare that there had never been any unity between us the Muslims and the Armenians on economic grounds alone. We had been living as good neighbors and liked each other. . . . In the past there had not been any armed clashes and if cases of murder happened, they were single exceptions and had never assumed any large proportions.²⁹

In its characteristically published proclamations the Difa blamed Russia for the recent bloodshed, but also warned the Armenians that violence on their part would be answered in kind. The Difa did in fact resort to acts of individual terror, mainly against native officials – police and military – known to have encouraged Armenians to anti-Muslim excesses. A product of the "Turk-Armenian War," the Difa, in turning primarily against Russia, broke the long spell of passive acquiescence to native rule in a